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FINANCING OF THE UNITED NATIONS MISSION FOR THE REFERENDUM IN WESTERN SAHARA

Report of the Secretary-General

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The General Assembly, in paragraph 4 of its resolution 48/250 B of 23 June 1994 on the financing of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO), requested the Secretary-General to report, within 30 days, on the full implementation of the recommendations of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions that were approved by the Assembly in its resolutions 48/250 A of 14 April 1994 and 48/250 B, respectively. The present addendum to the report of the Secretary-General of 17 January 1994 (A/48/848) is submitted pursuant to that request.

II. COMMENTS ON THE RECOMMENDATIONS BY THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON ADMINISTRATIVE AND BUDGETARY QUESTIONS

2. In the reports of the Advisory Committee on the financing of MINURSO dated 17 March 1994 (A/48/906) and 1 June 1994 (A/48/947), the Committee made recommendations on a number of issues. The comments of the Secretariat on the recommendations are provided below.

Total number of medical personnel (A/48/906, para. 12)

3. The Advisory Committee believes that the total number of medical personnel is high, given the size of the Mission.

4. It may be recalled that the Medical Unit from Switzerland was deployed in the Mission area in 1991. The number of personnel in the Unit was initially determined based on the strength of MINURSO personnel in Laayoune and the deployment of military observers in 11 team sites countrywide, where local medical facilities are non-existent. At the time of deployment the military

component of the Mission, excluding the Medical Unit, consisted of 234 military observers, a signal unit of 37 and a movement control detachment of 12. The civilian component of the Mission totalled 132 international staff and a limited number of local staff mainly employed on a general temporary assistance basis. The total strength of the Mission was 415. Based on this analysis, the Swiss Medical Unit was deployed with a total strength of 50.

5. In the initial cost estimates for the maintenance of MINURSO for the period from 1 January to 31 December 1994, as presented in the report of the Secretary-General (A/48/848), the number of personnel in the Medical Unit was reduced from 50 to 41.

6. The authorized strength of MINURSO, excluding the Medical Unit, is composed of 231 military observers, a signal unit of 43, a movement control unit of 17, 55 civilian police monitors and 277 civilian personnel, including 81 locally recruited staff with a total strength of 663. It should be noted that the authorized strength of the Mission now exceeds its authorized strength at the time of deployment of the Medical Unit by a total of 208.

7. In May 1994, the Government of Switzerland informed the Secretary-General of its intention to withdraw the Medical Unit from MINURSO. Up to its withdrawal from the Mission area on 18 June 1994, the Medical Unit had been performing a wide variety of services to the MINURSO personnel, including surgery, X-rays and laboratory tests, as well as providing medical assistance to the local population. In view of the importance and the variety of services provided by the Medical Unit staff to the MINURSO personnel and to the local population, as well as taking into consideration the fact that medical services in the Mission area are limited or non-existent, a further review, following the recommendation of the Advisory Committee, proved that a total of 41 personnel in the Medical Unit was required.

Mission subsistence allowance (A/48/906, para. 14)

8. With regard to the payment of mission subsistence allowance (MSA), the Advisory Committee does not believe that staff who are voluntarily away from headquarters and not on official duty should receive mission subsistence allowance at the rate of $110 instead of $40 or $45 as the case may be.

9. Detailed information and data on the cost of living and infrastructure available in the operational area were reviewed by the Secretariat with a view to assessing the adequacy of the MSA rate in effect at that time.

10. On the basis of the results of the analysis of the survey, with effect from 1 July 1994, the MSA rate of $60 was established throughout the Mission area, including areas designated for rest and recreational purposes. The hardship element, which is included in the MSA rate, covers the difficult conditions obtaining in the Mission area. The established MSA rate would be paid on a continuous basis, i.e., including a period of accrued leave in the operational Mission area, weekends and compensatory time off wherever they are taken within the Mission area.

11. It may be recalled that a supplemental daily allowance of $5 was originally established to compensate the personnel stationed at the team sites where no fixed accommodation, sanitary and other facilities were available. As such accommodation is now provided, the allowance has been discontinued with effect from 1 July 1994.

12. The established MSA rate would be subject to review at regular intervals, in the light of operational developments in the Mission area.

Size of the Movement Control Unit (A/48/906, para. 16)

13. The Advisory Committee questions the need for a 17-member movement control unit, in view of the size of the Mission and taking into consideration the fact that the military force involved consists of observers only.

14. The Movement Control Unit was deployed in the Mission area in 1991 with a total strength of 12. As of 1 June 1992, the number of personnel in the Unit was increased to 17. It had been performing duties of a specific nature, including cargo handling, maritime aircraft and road/ground transportation. The Unit consisted of eight substantive personnel and eight other personnel assigned to the Force Orderly room for clerical and general duties. On 29 June 1994, the Canadian Movement Control Unit was withdrawn from the Mission and is now being replaced by civilian staff. When the transitional phase of the settlement plan is initiated, it will be necessary for MINURSO's communications and movement control elements to be replaced by full military support units.

Number of international General Service staff (A/48/906, para. 23)

15. With regard to the international General Service staff, the Advisory Committee believes that the number of 51 is high in relation to the size of the operation. The Committee also stresses that, wherever possible, General Service staff should be replaced by local staff.

16. Of the 51 General Service posts authorized for MINURSO, eight are assigned to the registration office of the Identification Commission. The remaining 43 posts are assigned to eight substantive sections of the Administration Division. Bearing in mind the observation of the Advisory Committee with regard to the high number of international General Service staff, the MINURSO administration is constantly searching the local labour market for qualified personnel to replace General Service staff.

17. The additional 27 General Service staff, authorized for the period from 1 April to 31 July 1994, are mainly assigned to the registration office of the Identification Commission to provide secretarial, clerical, administrative and technical assistance to the members of the Commission. The number of the General Service staff in the Mission area will be reduced as the peak workload of the Identification Commission is over.

Review of the basis for applying the Rabat standard costs to the Mission area (A/48/906, para. 25)

18. The Advisory Committee was informed by the representatives of the Secretary-General that the local salary scale established for MINURSO was based on the Rabat standard costs. In this connection, the Advisory Committee recommended that a review of the basis for applying the Rabat standard costs to the Mission area be undertaken since the cost of living in Rabat could be higher than that in Laayoune.

19. A survey of the local labour conditions was undertaken by the United Nations Secretariat, and data on the cost of living in Laayoune were analysed. The results of the survey indicate the following:

(a) In Western Sahara, Laayoune and major cities, qualified clerical staff, especially with a knowledge of the English language, are not available. Hence such staff need to be recruited from Casablanca and Rabat. Furthermore, in view of the financial incentives offered by the Government of Morocco in Western Sahara, MINURSO has experienced difficulties in attracting and retaining local labour and lower-level clerical staff;

(b) The economy of the Territory, with long traditions of nomadism, derives practically all food and commodities from Morocco and the Canary Islands, thus drastically increasing the cost of living in Laayoune compared to that of Rabat;

(c) The local labour market in Western Sahara is not properly structured.

20. For the above-mentioned reasons it was considered impractical to attempt to establish a separate salary scale for Western Sahara.

Consultants (A/48/906, para. 26)

21. The Advisory Committee questioned the need for two consultants for a period of six months, and was of the view that payment of $7,700 per month for each consultant was excessive. In accordance with the recommendation of the Advisory Committee, the duration of the services of the two consultants was reduced from six months to two months each. Based on the complexity of the work to be performed and the level of competence required in such a specialized field of activity, which includes studies on modalities used in the 1974 census, the 1974 census update, studies on the demographic aspects of the tribal structure in Western Sahara and on the referendum modalities and procedures, the fee of $7,700 per month for each consultant is considered reasonable.

Helicopter and aircraft hire (A/48/906, para. 27)

22. The Advisory Committee recommended that the number of helicopters (5) and fixed-wing aircraft (3) required for hiring should be reviewed, taking into consideration the size of the Mission. Following this recommendation, the rental of one fixed-wing aircraft was terminated, effective 1 May 1994.

Abolition of the D-2 post (A/48/947, para. 12)

23. The Advisory Committee was not convinced that sufficient justification existed for freezing the D-2 post, encumbered by the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General. The Advisory Committee therefore recommended that the D-2 post be abolished. Accordingly, following reactivation of an Assistant Secretary-General post, the D-2 post was abolished effective 1 June 1994.

24. It should be noted that non-implementation of some of the observations and recommendations of the Advisory Committee contained in its report of 17 March 1994 (A/48/906), was due to the short period of time that has elapsed since the General Assembly took action on the Committee's recommendations.